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15 December 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Chester L. Cooper

SUBJECT: The Montagnard Problem in South Vietnam

1. Relations have long been uneasy between the Government of Vietnam (GVN) and the native inhabitants of South Vietnam's highland regions, known collectively as Montagnards. Disturbances in September 1964 were symptomatic of general Montagnard disaffection, even though the actual troubles in September involved only one tribe (the Rhade), were confined to a few training camps, and were certainly abetted, if not fomented, by outside agitation from the Communists and, possibly, the Cambodians and/or the French. The GVN quelled the September disturbances through a combination of firmness, tact, and promises, but none of the basic issues responsible for Montagnard dissidence were resolved.

2. There are at present a number of disturbing rumblings in the highland areas, signs of increasingly effective Viet Cong (VC) activity among the Montagnards, and some indications of possible Cambodian or French support for the anti-GVN Montagnard autonomy movement. There is fairly good evidence that a *de facto* "truce" now exists between the VC and GVN Montagnard units. Letters are circulating over the signature of Montagnard leader Y Bham Enoul taking the line that the Montagnard problem can never be settled until the Montagnard are given independence, appealing for foreign (including US) and United Nations aid for the Montagnard cause, and claiming that the latter already has some outside assistance.* Rumors

*Y Bham Enoul was a leader in the abortive 1958 Montagnard revolt against Diem. After Diem's overthrow he was Deputy Province Chief of Darlac. Some of the participants in the September 1964 "uprising" claimed he was its leader and though this was probably not the case, he has been in hiding--possibly in Cambodia--since then and seems to be playing an increasingly active part in the Montagnard autonomy movement.

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25X1 are circulating of another Montagnard uprising--or, more accurately, another Khade uprising, since this tribe remains the principal source of active Montagnard dissidence.

[redacted] that another uprising will take place on or about 26 December and will be preceded on 20 December by an announcement of Montagnard "independence" which will be made in Paris. The accuracy of these various reports and rumors is impossible to ascertain, but GVN security forces are very much concerned over the imminent possibility of further Montagnard disturbances.

3. Whatever be the truth of individual reports, the situation in the highland areas is obviously serious and getting worse. The situation is exacerbated by the GVN's failure to date to take more than token action to implement its recent promises to the Montagnards, particularly those promises it invoked to settle last September's troubles. Even if nothing so dramatic as another uprising should occur, unless current trends are reversed, there is a real danger that individual Montagnard villages and tribes will become increasingly inclined to make their peace with the VC and adopt postures of increasing hostility towards the GVN and all its works.

4. The CIA Role in Montagnard Activities. During the 1961-1963 period, approximately 22,24,000 Montagnard were involved in the CIDG program over which the CIA then exercised operational control. In January and February of 1963, full control over the CIDG effort was transferred to MACV. From that time until February 1964 CIA had little contact with Montagnard leaders and was in no way operationally involved with them, particularly in the paramilitary field. Since early 1964, with the Ambassador's explicit approval, the CIA has worked in various ways with the GVN to improve the latter's relations with the Montagnards. These efforts resulted in the creation of a Special Staff Office in the Vietnamese Department of Defense to assist in the pacification of the highlands, an agreement by General Khanh (then Premier) to include Montagnard leaders in the government, and some gestures by General Khanh to dramatize his concern for the Montagnards and their problems. Since early 1964, the CIA

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has urged the GVN to create and support an effective Montagnard Affairs Bureau and a Council of Montagnard Notables. Little was achieved, however; the Bureau exists on paper but has had little authority and its activities have bogged down in the general Vietnamese bureaucratic quagmire. In the summer of 1964, with the approval of Ambassador Taylor and the Chief of the USOM Public Safety Division, the CIA set up a training program for some 200 Montagnards who, after training, are to be used as small teams for counter-terror, armed political action, and resource control missions in VC-infested areas. In all, the CIA's Saigon Station has had about five officers dealing with the Montagnards and only two on a semi-permanent basis. One of these two is an

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GAC:du:15Dec64

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